

# Pick Your Portion

by Meredith Matthews

## How to right-size your meals

It's an ordinary morning. You wake up and help yourself to a bowl of cereal. But do you ever stop to think about exactly how much you're pouring into the bowl? And if you have pancakes instead, how many should you eat?

For many people, the amount of food they eat—their *portion size*—is decided by their eyes, their stomachs, or both. They might put as much food on their plates as they think they want, and then eat it simply because it's there. Or they might decide to put their forks down only once they begin to feel full. But neither of those is the healthiest way to figure out portion sizes.

## Serving Size vs. Portion Size

So how do you know what the right portion size is? Nutrition information on the package is a good place to start. The label shows how much of each nutrient is in a given amount of food, explains Tandalayo Kidd. She's a nutrition expert at Kansas State University in Manhattan. But the serving size on the label is one thing. The amount a person thinks is a portion size might be somewhat different. In other words, the serving size listed on the package may not be the same amount you actually eat.

For example, a 3-ounce package of chips may actually contain three 1-ounce servings. So what happens if you wolf down the whole bag? You guessed it: You've actually eaten three servings of chips, not just one. The same goes for a lot of foods.

Without a nutrition label, it can be hard to tell exactly how much food is the right amount. When you have a slice of lasagna at your grandma's house or a dish of ice cream at a sundae party, how do you know whether you're eating a healthy portion size or going overboard? Nutrition experts have come up with ways to figure out portion size at a glance. Those guidelines won't give you the exact amount for every food, but they are a good estimate.

## Portion Distortion

Portion sizes have been getting bigger through the years. Today's 20-ounce soft drink is roughly double the size of the bottle of cola your parents might have had when they were your age. Those types of changes make it easy to ignore the serving size on the label and instead treat the whole package as one serving. (Have you ever put the cap back on a 20-ounce drink to save the rest for the next day?)

Eating or drinking more than one serving at a time means you're getting more calories, according to Kidd. "Increased portion sizes encourage *overconsumption*," she says. Larger portion sizes affect the amount people think they should eat. Brothers Jason J. and Patrick J., of Connecticut, have noticed

that restaurant portions are often a lot bigger than they need to be. Patrick, 11, had an enormous breakfast recently at a diner. It had large portions of pancakes, eggs, toast, and potatoes. "I ate it all, though," he said.

Jason, 9, knows what happens when you fall for that, though. "If you're real hungry, you would probably eat it all," he says. "Then it makes you feel stuffed." But most of the time, the boys agree, that extra food goes to waste.

Large portions are often the norm at fast food restaurants as well. So-called value-sized or supersized meals, which are usually just a few cents more than a regular-sized meal, sure are tempting. They make you think that you are getting more bang for your buck, says Kidd. People like to get the most food possible for the money they are spending. But if you opt for supersized foods and meals, you're also choosing more calories, fat, and carbohydrates. A healthier option is to take advantage of the "value" of a value meal. Order the larger size, but split it with a friend.

## Sensible Choices

Whether you're getting takeout, grabbing a snack, or cooking at home, it helps to pay attention to portions. Aim for balance. "You don't always want to be eating big portions all the time, and you don't want to be eating just tiny little portions that give you no protein or nutrients," says Sabrina F., 15, of Missouri.

The solution? Right-size your portion sizes! Sabrina's favorite food is chili. But she makes sure not to pig out when it's on the menu. "I don't usually get too big of a portion," she says. "I don't want to get full before my brain is able to realize that I'm full." That takes about 20 minutes. Eating slowly can help your brain get the message before you've eaten way more than you should.

Knowing what's a healthy portion is helpful when it comes to all types of food, from breakfast to dessert and everything in between. Sabrina's classmate Rita W. knows that. "Serving sizes can make the difference between enjoying a little pie or gaining 5 pounds," Rita says.

## A Healthy Portion Looks Like ...

Nutrition expert Tandalayo Kidd offers some serving size guidelines. Use the visual reminders to help you keep your portions in line.

Food Group	One Serving Size Equals ...	What a Serving Looks Like
<b>Grains</b> <i>6 ounces per day</i>	1 slice of bread 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal ½ cup cooked rice, cooked pasta, or cooked cereal	 <i>ice-cream scoop</i>
<b>Fruits</b> <i>1½ cups per day</i>	1 cup fruit 1 cup 100 percent fruit juice ½ cup dried fruit	 <i>one piece of fruit the size of a baseball, tennis ball, or lightbulb</i>
<b>Vegetables</b> <i>2½ cups per day</i>	1 cup raw or cooked vegetables 1 cup vegetable juice 2 cups raw leafy greens	 <i>one vegetable the size of a baseball, tennis ball, or lightbulb</i>
<b>Dairy</b> <i>3 cups per day</i>	1 cup milk or yogurt 1½ ounces natural cheese 2 ounces processed cheese	 <i>four dice (one serving of cheese)</i>
<b>Meat &amp; Beans</b> <i>5 ounces per day</i>	3 ounces meat, poultry, or fish ¼ cup cooked dry beans 2 tablespoons peanut butter ½ ounce nuts or seeds	 <i>deck of cards (meat) Ping-Pong ball (peanut butter)</i>
<b>Oils</b> <i>5 teaspoons (that's less than 2 tablespoons) per day</i>	2 tablespoons butter, mayonnaise, or salad dressing 1 slice of bacon	 <i>tip of a thumb</i>

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*Think About It* Why, do you think, are portions at restaurants often larger than what one person should eat at a time? How can you eat the right amount when you're eating out?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is portion size?

- A. the amount of food someone eats
- B. the amount of nutrients in a given amount of food
- C. the number of items that someone orders at a restaurant
- D. the number of people you can split a "value-sized" meal with

2. What does the author contrast with portion size?

- A. waist size
- B. shoe size
- C. clothing size
- D. serving size

3. Read this sentence from the text.

"Portion sizes have been getting bigger through the years."

What evidence in the text supports this statement?

- A. "When you have a slice of lasagna at your grandma's house or a dish of ice cream at a sundae party, how do you know whether you're eating a healthy portion size or going overboard?"
- B. "Today's 20-ounce soft drink is roughly double the size of the bottle of cola your parents might have had when they were your age."
- C. "So-called value-sized or supersized meals, which are usually just a few cents more than a regular-sized meal, sure are tempting."
- D. "Knowing what's a healthy portion is helpful when it comes to all types of food, from breakfast to dessert and everything in between."

**4.** Read these sentences from the text.

"Large portions are often the norm at fast food restaurants as well. So-called value-sized or supersized meals, which are usually just a few cents more than a regular-sized meal, sure are tempting. They make you think that you are getting more bang for your buck, says Kidd. People like to get the most food possible for the money they are spending. But if you opt for supersized foods and meals, you're also choosing more calories, fat, and carbohydrates. A healthier option is to take advantage of the 'value' of a value meal. Order the larger size, but split it with a friend."

Based on this paragraph, what can you infer about consuming calories, fat, and carbohydrates?

- A. Consuming lots of calories and fat is healthy, but consuming lots of carbohydrates is unhealthy.
- B. Consuming lots of calories, fat, and carbohydrates has no effect on a person's health.
- C. Consuming lots of calories, fat, and carbohydrates is unhealthy.
- D. Consuming lots of calories, fat, and carbohydrates is healthy.

**5.** What is the main idea of this text?

- A. If you are eating food that comes in a package, you should look at the nutrition label to figure out what the right portion size is.
- B. Nutrition experts have come up with ways for people to figure out portion size when eating food without a nutrition label.
- C. People should pay attention to serving size as well as portion size to make sure they are eating a healthy amount of food.
- D. So-called value-sized or supersized meals contain more calories, fat, and carbohydrates than regular-sized meals do.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

"Without a nutrition label, it can be hard to tell exactly how much food is the right amount. When you have a slice of lasagna at your grandma's house or a dish of ice cream at a sundae party, how do you know whether you're eating a healthy portion size or going overboard?"

What does the phrase "going overboard" mean here?

- A. trying too hard
- B. falling off the side of a ship
- C. eating a healthy amount
- D. eating too much

7. Read these sentences from the text.

"Whether you're getting takeout, grabbing a snack, or cooking at home, it helps to pay attention to portions. Aim for balance. 'You don't always want to be eating big portions all the time, and you don't want to be eating just tiny little portions that give you no protein or nutrients,' says Sabrina F., 15, of Missouri.

The solution? Right-size your portion sizes!"

How could the last two sentences best be combined?

- A. The solution is right-size your portion sizes?
- B. The solution being to right-size your portion sizes.
- C. The solution was to right-size your portion sizes.
- D. The solution is to right-size your portion sizes.

8. What have Jason and Patrick noticed about portions of food at restaurants?

**9.** Read these sentences from the text.

"Portion sizes have been getting bigger through the years. Today's 20-ounce soft drink is roughly double the size of the bottle of cola your parents might have had when they were your age. Those types of changes make it easy to ignore the serving size on the label and instead treat the whole package as one serving. (Have you ever put the cap back on a 20-ounce drink to save the rest for the next day?)"

Based on this paragraph, what can you conclude about the effect that bigger portion sizes have had on the amount that people eat and drink?

**10.** Explain whether people are more likely to eat too much or too little.

Support your answer with evidence from the text.